

Varicella (Chicken Pox) Fact Sheet

What Is Varicella?	Varicella, or chicken pox, is a very contagious disease caused by the varicella-zoster virus of the herpes family.
What are the symptoms?	A skin rash of blister-like lesions, usually on the face, scalp, or trunk is the most common symptom. The rash appears first on the trunk and face, but can spread over the entire body causing between 250 to 500 itchy blisters. Children usually miss 5 or 6 days of school or childcare due to their chickenpox. About half of all children with chickenpox visit a doctor due to symptoms such as high fever, severe itching, an uncomfortable rash, dehydration or headache. In addition, about 1 child in 10 has a complication from chickenpox serious enough to visit a doctor including infected skin lesions, other infections, dehydration from vomiting or diarrhea, attack of asthma, or pneumonia. Most cases of chickenpox occur in persons less than 15 years old.
How is Varicella treated?	Calamine lotion and Aveeno (oatmeal) baths may help relieve some of the itching. Do not use aspirin or aspirin-containing products to relieve a child's fever. The use of aspirin has been associated with development of Reye syndrome (a severe disease affecting all organs, but most seriously affecting the liver and brain, that may cause death). Use non-aspirin medications such as acetaminophen (commonly known as Tylenol®). Your health care provider will advise you on other treatments.
How do people catch this disease?	Chickenpox is highly infectious and spreads from person to person by direct contact or through the air from an infected person's coughing or sneezing. A person with chickenpox is contagious 1-2 days before the rash appears and until all blisters have formed scabs. It takes from 10-21 days after contact with an infected person for someone to develop chickenpox.
What can be done to stop the spread of this disease?	Varicella vaccine may prevent this disease. This vaccine is a requirement to attend day care and school in South Carolina.

For more information about varicella, visit: www.cdc.gov